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SUBJECT: PDAS Pittman Meets with Angolan Ministry of
External Relations

¶1. Summary: During a meeting with the Ministry of External Relations PDAS Bobby Pittman committed to additional high-level State Department visitors to Angola; discussed how best Angola might benefit from AGOA, and exchanged views on the voter registration and election timetable in Angola, noting how important it is for the people of Angola to have faith in the electoral system. End Summary.

¶2. PDAS Bobby Pittman met on May 19, 2006, with Balbina da Silva, Director for the Americas at the Ministry of External Relations. PDAS Pittman was accompanied by Charge James Knight and Management Officer (notetaker). Director Balbina was accompanied by Counselor for Economic Affairs, Domingos Antonio. Balbina opened with regrets that Foreign Minister Miranda and Vice Minister Chicoty were both traveling and unavailable to meet with PDAS Pittman.

¶3. PDAS Pittman expressed his commitment to a greater number of high-level visits from Washington, not only additional visits of his own, but also from Deputy Assistant Secretaries Jeff Krilla and Carol Thompson. Director

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Balbina said the GRA would welcome additional visits and hoped that Assistant Secretary Frazer would soon propose a date for her postponed visit.

¶4. Director Balbina thanked the U.S. for its assistance in the health sector, citing the President's Malaria Initiative and programs to combat the spread of HIV. She noted that Angola has a relatively low level of HIV but that additional assistance would help prevent the spread of the disease.

Interest in AGOA

¶5. Director Balbina said she hoped Angola would benefit from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGO A) and requested PDAS Pittman's help in this regard. She noted the Monday, May 22 AGOA digital video conference scheduled in Luanda, and expressed her hope that the conference would help clarify how Angolan exporters could meet customs and market requirements. PDAS Pittman acknowledged that it is often difficult for countries to attain AGOA status, but noted that President Bush's African policy is based on partnerships. He said he hoped Angolan exporters would be able to partner with American buyers but cited two challenges: export regulations and the size of the market. With regard to the first, PDAS Pittman related the experience of Afghanistan, where changes in the regulatory environment reduced the time required to register small businesses from ninety days to one week. On the second point, PDAS Pittman shared the example of a supplier of high quality doors in South Africa. The Home Depot Inc. placed an order for the doors which was more than the supplier could produce in 10 years. Both Director Balbina and PDAS

Pittman agreed that it would be critical to link the right partners and better define the market.

Election Timetable?

¶6. PDAS Pittman asked Director Balbina for her views on the timetable for voter registration and elections and offered U.S. assistance in addressing obstacles that might remain. Balbina said voter registration would begin soon, but noted that landmines remained a danger for voters and election officials. She reported that a landmine commission had been created to speed up the de-mining effort. (Note: Balbina is the deputy of the National Landmine Committee. End Note.) PDAS Pittman pointed to the importance of a strong electoral commission, contrasting the positive experience of Zambia with that of Mauritania. He pointed out that the way in which election results are viewed can be linked to the confidence of voters in the strength and integrity of the electoral commission. Balbina replied that the Angolan electoral commission was not appointed by the government and enjoys broad representation. She said that what happened in 1992 would not happen again, predicting that whoever lost would have to accept the result. PDAS Pittman said it was important that the people have confidence in the system and observed that Angola seemed to be on the right path. Pressed for a timetable on elections, Director Balbina replied that although she is not an expert on elections, she couldn't imagine that it would take more than one year to register voters. Note: Voter registration is planned to take six months. End Note.

¶7. PDAS Pittman has cleared this message.

KNIGHT